

Forest urbanism, when forest becomes an active entrepreneur: the case of Rotselaar

Full paper abstract submission – Research paper

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Keywords: Forest urbanism, Landscape Urbanism, Territory of dispersion, Forestry, Strategic Project

Rotselaar is one of the most forested municipalities of the dispersed Belgian territory. The future of this identity is threatened since the land-use plans make the deforestation quite easy. In a special land-use “woonpark” forest and housing can coexist, but the increasing urbanization with its lack of attention for maintaining the forest is threatening also this one. The rules of the land-use are outdated. They cannot cope with changing societal configuration and the lack of individual care for forest. (Winters and De Decker, 2009) (Van Herck and De Meulder, 2009)

Since the 1930s the Heikantberg and Middelberg are gradually being urbanized. First large size plots with small summerhouses were inserted in a balanced way in the forest. After the world wars and due to the post-war housing policies this urbanization process speeded up with increasing house sizes and reducing plots making the built density much higher. Since the 1970s these sizes are fixed in the regulation. Unfortunately now almost 50 years later we must conclude that the regulation was too urbanization minded leading to an unbalanced landscape. The municipality of Rotselaar is taking up this problem now that the largest available plot, 4ha, is about to be allotted. (Darlan Boris, 2013)

This paper will discuss the results of the collaboration between research institute – RUA (Research group of Urbanism and Architecture) KULeuven – the municipality of Rotselaar, the Flemish Government and the private developer to design a different future for the largest private plot. If this plot is urbanized as all the others the forest would be seriously harmed. The design is an attempt to activate a discussion on urban development through the forest as a main figure. The forest thus functions as intermediate between the individual forested plot and the forest as a landscape; between public administration and private developer; between short term cash backs and long term forest valorization. A pilot project for the forest as intermediate design tool. (Wambecq and De Meulder, 2013)

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